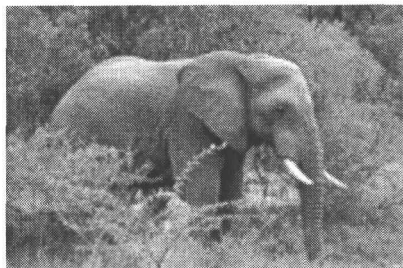


TRAVEL REPORT

15TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ARACHNOLOGY: A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE



Sample of the megafauna

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Badplaas spa complex

The latest International Congress of Arachnology was held 26-March 2001 at the resort of Badplaas, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The conference was well organized by Ansie Dippenaar-Schoeman from the Agriculture Research Center in Pretoria. About 200 people from 34 countries gave 120 oral and 65 poster presentations. Plenary talks were given on the evolution of silk producing systems in spiders, genitalic polymorphism, and the minor arachnid orders. There were symposia on scorpions, *Argyrodes*, social spiders and theraphosids. Sessions were grouped into systematics, biodiversity, behaviour, ecology and electronic media. Araneae, of course, dominated the discussions, but there were presentations on Scorpiones, Opiliones, Solifugae, Pseudoscorpiones, and Schizomida.

Most people arrived Saturday and overnighed in Pretoria before taking buses or cars to Badplaas (a spa resort, literally "bath farm"). The only rain I saw was on that connecting trip - a wonderful thunderstorm with sheets of rain. Some presenters were stranded in Amsterdam an extra day and so the printed program became somewhat jumbled. About half of the attendees took the mid-conference excursion to Kruger National Park to see the megafauna. There were post conference tours to Kruger and the escarpment as well as a collecting tour. Europeans and Americans dominated the conference participants. Other than South Africa, there were only five other African nations represented.

I was the only resident Canadian at the conference. Although there were up to three concurrent sessions, I was able to attend about half of the oral presentations and reviewed all of the poster papers. I opted for including breakfasts and dinners with my accommodation expenses. Meals were served buffet-style with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables and meats. There was a South African Potjie dinner as well as Portuguese and Mongolian nights. On Thursday night, we ate near the river and enjoyed Swasi dancers and drummers. Plenty of food was also available at the breaks. With conference time over-runs (mainly due to technical difficulties with computer presentations), timing of my presentations and chairing a session, I had little time for any lunches. Thus my over-eating at breakfasts and dinners was compensated somewhat by my very light lunches! One evening I joined some scorpion people for some collecting by black lights. No scorpions were found in the adjoining Embuleni Nature Reserve but we made a hasty retreat when we encountered, a little too closely, a rhino. At least we spotted several pairs of shining orange eyes of bush babies (*Lorisidae*/*Galagidae*) in the trees.

After the conference, I joined 7 Americans, 3 Germans, 2 Japanese and 1 Dane on an excursion to Kruger Park and the Klein Drakensberg ("small dragon mountains"). We stayed two nights in the park, one night on the edge of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve and one night in northern Johannesburg. I was very impressed by the biodiversity and biomass of large mammals in Kruger. I saw impala, 3 other kinds of antelope, buffalo, giraffe, wildebeest, zebra, elephant, baboon, monkey, hippo, lion, hyena, serval, and African wild cat but only one leopard's tail -- as it disappeared into the bush. There were no unfortunate episodes, other than my luggage going south for 3 days while I went north.



Crowds enjoying ice-cream on a hot day.

The next International Congress will be held in Belgium (July 2004) and three years after that in Brazil.

Robert Holmberg



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